THE RAGTIMER

MAY 1969

JUNE 1969

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THE RAGTIME SOCIETY P. O. BOX 520 WESTON ONTARIO CANADA

Since Max Morath is now on the road with his widely acclaimed off-Broadway show 'An Evening With Max Morath At The Turn Of The Century', we thought you might be interested in a review of his show while it was appearing in New York at the Jan Hus Theatre.

RAGTIME IN NEW YORK

By Harold Stern

"An Evening With Max Morath At The Turn Of The Century" is a perfect illustration of why I can't get the theatre out of my system.

It is off-Broadway. It has less original music than any musical in New York. It has fewer gimmicks. It has one set. It has the smallest cast. Put them all together and you have the best musical evening to be had in any theatre in New York City.

One man, sans synthesizer, minus amplification, big beatless, fully clothed, but with a delightful sense of humor, a love of ragtime and a genius for performing it, a knowledge of turn of the century songs and stylings that borders on the fantastic and an aptitude toward pure showmanship that defies description, that's Max Morath.

I expected to like Max. I always have. But I think I've been selling him short. I never dreamed he was capable of putting on such a big, full, exciting and entertaining production. The show, as the title clearly indicates, is steeped in nostalgia. But it's anything but the wallowing kind. If you want to listen, Morath has several points to make as he compares present-day society and attitudes with those of 60 to 75 years ago. If you let them, the parallels may shake you up. But Morath isn't conducting a seminar. His show is more than the outpourings of a one-tract mind. He delves into the evils of alcohol and the evils of women's rights and the evils of the dirty ragtime music of the era and then he goes ahead and sings and plays the pop and ragtime numbers of the turn of the century. But he does it all with with and warmth and healthy good cheer.

He wants to prove, he insists, that not all bad songs are being written today. But he makes the bad songs of yesteryear sound like so much fun, they're good.

"Drink", he asserts, playing the line, as he does everything, in period, "is what makes a man take a shot at his landlord.

"Drink", he goes on, "is what makes him miss."

The show is a series of one highlight after another and it's hard to pick favourites. He does a great vaudeville turn, using a phonograph as a partner. He illustrates his commentary and his music with some charming stereoptican slides. He does that wonderful Jelly Roll Morton description of how "Tiger Rag" came to be written, taken directly from Jelly Roll's recordings for the Library of Congress.

But the best moments and, surprisingly, those invariably received with an ovation, are the times he just sits at the piano and plays some of the most delicately lovely and melodic ragtime ever written.

If you've seen Morath in person or on TV or have heard his records, you have an idea what to expect. He's done practically everything in the show in some way or other at some time before. But, he has never done as much nor organized it as well nor been so infernally entertaining about it. He's irresistible, and that's dangerous. He may find himself forced to perform at the Jan Hus Playhouse for the rest of his life.

MEMORIES RECALLED

One of our newest members, and perhaps our eldest member, Mr. Ralph R. Winship, has thoughtfully corresponded with us a number of times during the past year. The following is a letter he sent to the Ragtime Society which we feel the membership will find interesting. The dates he mentions places him right in the time of Ragtime's greatest success. Part of a newspaper article on him follows the letter. We wish to thank Mr. Winship for his interest in the Ragtime Society and especially for giving to the Society the personally autographed picture of W. C. Handy which appeared in the last issue of The Ragtimer.

'Dear Ragtime Society,

Sorry I'm so late answering your letter of March 10th but I have had a long sick spell and just getting over it - I hope. At my age it's a slow process but feeling a little better each day so hope eventually to get back to normal.

Your questions about ragtime bring back a lot of memories. At one time I considered myself almost a pro but after all these years my fingers just won't track right and it certainly makes me mad as I still do love to play. I was born here in Phillipsburg in 1883 and there certainly was not much talent here then. Just a few houses, two small outfitting stores, a church and school house. But my mother was a fairly good musician and they had a piano shipped here from Boston. That was quite a novelty then.

Mother tried to teach me to play but I did not take kindly to someone telling me what to do. So she finally got disgusted and refused to teach me any more. That suited me and I took over the instruction book and developed into quite a good self-taught musician.. As the town grew I took a great interest in getting other boys and girls interested in band and orchestra work and I was always able to dig up quite a bit of talent and for a few years we were the only source of that kind of entertainment and always were in demand; and later ragtime became the rage so we fell right in with that as we all liked it and so did the public. When the railroad came through here it broadened our territory and we had plenty of jobs as we were the best in this section of the country. Later I traveled quite a lot and came in contact with many of the best in the business but never got very intimate with any of them as I was hardly good enough to travel in their company. But I had records and sheet music from most all of them and always kept up on the latest in that way. But through correspondence I made one very good friend W. C. Handy, Father of the Blues. We became quite intimate through our letters about blues and ragtime. He went blind of course and just before he died he autographed his picture for me and sent it to me. I have kept it all these years but now I think it would be worth more in your files so I am sending it to you and hope you will preserve it. I hated to see ragtime and blues die out but I don't think it will ever die out entirely. In fact it is back now in other forms but I don't care much for the modern forms. But I guess that's progress.

Later I became interested in movies and got in this business right at the start and remained in the business until I retired January 1, 1969. On my retirement our local paper wanted an article on my many years in the business so one of my daughters wrote it up for them (with my help) and they published it.

I think it is well written and covers most everything so I'm sending you tear sheets and hope you find it interesting. The only thing about it that I don't like is my picture taken in the old box office window. The photographer sure got a bad shot as I certainly don't look quite that bad. But my picture at 22 years of age sort of off-sets it so we'll let it go at that.

By the way I ordered one copy of "Solace" and you sent two so I'm returning one as you might have a call for it.

Hope I've covered most of the items you brought up but it would almost make a book if I tried to go into more detail so I won't try. But I do hope I've covered most of the things we are most interested in.

Very truly,

Ralph R. Winship'

The following is a much shortened version of a large newspaper article, which included many pictures. It appeared in the Phillips County Review, Phillipsburg, Kansas, in January, 1969.

' OLDEST MOVIE EXHIBITOR IN WORLD RETIRES

Ralph's career in the theatre business began in 1905 at the age of 22. The family was in the mercantile business occupying a brick building 25 feet wide on the northeast corner of Fourth and State streets. Ralph's father, Fred, decided to widen the building and put on a second story for an opera house.

The largest company to play at the opera house was a minstrel show of 35 people which brought its own band and orchestra and arrived in a chartered train. Admission was $1. 25 -- lots of money in those days when most wage earners didn't make that much for a day's labor. Surprisingly enought, Ralph recalls that these productions were good and some of the players went on and became the early silent screen movie stars.

In the early 1920's when it was obvious road shows were doomed to oblivion, they closed the opera house and remodeled the ground floor into a 700-seat theatre. This is the same theatre, except for minor changes such as a wider screen, that is being used today. The theatre was also a popular location for school plays, important town meetings, etc. Only a few of the road shows remained. One of the most popular was the Chick Boyes show. They would take a week's booking and give a different performance each night -- a comedy one night, then a drama, next a mystery, etc. During intermission, crackerjacks were sold for 10 cents a box. Prizes were inside and attendants would hold up the best ones for all to see.

TALENTED PIANIST

Ralph's hobby today is playing the piano and he is among the best in town. He developed his skill over half a century ago while playing for silent movies. People read the subtitles to themselves while Ralph supplied the mood music. When the heroine was dying, he would play sad music on the piano, then quickly go into happy music when she was saved, etc.

Then, in 1927 the first talking pictures came to Phillipsburg. The sound was on phonograph records which were supposed to be synchronized with the film, but problems were frequent, says Ralph. The film was brittle and every time it broke and was spliced the record would be off. Actors would be saying one thing and you'd be hearing another. Later, someone discovered he could put a sound track right on the film and that's the way it 's done today.

Ralph's longevity in the motion picture business has not gone unnoticed. In 1955 to celebrate his 50th year in show business, a champagne dinner was given in his honor. Many members of the film industry in Kansas and Missouri were present to help celebrate the event. Gold theatre programs were printed that year to signify the milestone which he had reached.

Ralph's retirement this month means the end to a long, eventful career in which he was responsible for sending thousands of men, women, and children into the celluloid world of make believe--where they forgot their troubles and cares, while they laughed and cried with their favorite actor or actress! His contribution to this community is one of unique service to his fellow men--giving them a chance to escape reality and return refreshed and better able to cope with life! His name--Ralph Winship-- is stamped indelibly across the face of this community!'

LETTERS

Letters are welcome from members. We will attempt to answer questions pertaining to ragtime in this column. Full address of correspondent will be printed unless requested otherwise.

Do you know of any recordings of classic rag on acoustic guitar? I can play a few myself, having learned them from a fellow in Ann Arbor Michigan who has been transposing the piano music for guitar. Though ragtime is really best on piano, I think syncopation and the walking bass are fantastic on guitar. Can you help with information on guitar recordings?

Laurence Kressel
175 Eastern Parkway
Brooklyn, New York 11238

Fred Van Eps made an album in 1951 on his own Five-String Banjo label, with Maple Leaf and Oriole, among others--can you tell me how to get that album?

William L. McAdams
1200 Maple Apt. B
Columbia, S. C. 29205

(Ed. - Can any of our members help with the answers to the above letters?

RECORD REVIEW

by TEX WYNDHAM

Exclusive 501 (stereo or Mono), "Grand Piano", piano duets by Willie 'The Lion' Smith and Don Ewell.

Selections: I've FoundA New Baby; A Porter's Love Song (To A Chambermaid); I Would Do Anything For You; Some Of These Days; Just You, Just Me; Everybody Loves My Baby; Can't We Be Friends?; You Took Advantage Of Me; Keepin' Out Of Mischief Now; Sweet Georgia Brown.

Willie 'The Lion" Smith is one of the most distinctive pianists ever to play in the traditional idiom. His florid style, characterized by treble grace notes and somewhat more modern harmonies than are usually employed by traditional pianists, has always made The Lion's playing instantly recognizable to anyone even slightly familiar with his music..

With a possible nod in the direction of Cliff Jackson, The Lion is the last surviving founder of the New York 'rent party' style of ragtime. Still active as a pianist, The Lion has lost none of his drive andinventivenessat the keyboard. He has appeared on many jazz records, as well as on some solo Lps, and in every case, his clean, lyrical style, and his underlying feeling of stomping rhythm so characteristic of the New York pianists, come ringing through loud and clear. Among his solo Lps are the following:

Commodore FL 30, 003 'Original Compositions - Piano Solos'
Echoes Of Spring; Rippling Waters; Passionette; Sneakaway; The Boy And The Boat; Fading Star; Fingerbuster; Morning Air; Concentrating; I'll Follow You.

Commodore FL 30, 004 'Show Time ' Piano Solos"
What Is There To Say; Stormy Weather; Tea for Two; The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea; I Can't Give You Anything But Love; Just One Of Those Things; Madelon; Hallelujah; Poor Butterfly; Smoke Gets In Your Eyes.

Dot DLP 3094 'The Lion Roars'
The Lion Roars; Willie's Blues; Ragtime Medley (Blame It on The Blues); Carolina Shout; Portrait Of The Duke; Lion's Boogie Woogie; Squeeze Me; Bring On The Band; Contrary Motion; Echo Of Spring; Fingerbustin'; Ziz-Zag; Roll 'Em, Rock 'Em And Weep. (Accompanies on some tracks by Wendell Marshall, bass and Osie Johnson, drums, Some tracks also contain spoken conversation with Leonard Feather.)

Good Time Jazz M 12035 'Luckey & The Lion'
Morning Air; Relaxin'; Rippling Water; Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea; Tango La Caprice; Concentratin'. (All Solos. Side two contains six piano solos by Luckey Roberts.)

All of the above Lps are excellent. They would be enjoyed by anyone who likes the New York ragtime style and by most other ragtime fans. As an improviser and composer, The Lion possesses an uncommonly rich melodic sense which compares, in inventiveness and passion, somewhat with that of traditional jazz soprano saxophonist Sidney Bechet's. However, The Lion never lets up on the rhythm; he is capable of striding it out with the best of them, and even when not explicitly stated, the steady beat is always clearly implied in his work.

Many of these Lps, however, are difficult, if not impossible, to obtain. The solos on Commodore were originally 78 rpm records made for Commodore in the late 1930's; re-released on Lp, they have been unavailable since Commodore went into bankruptcy a few years ago. (Much of the Commodore catalogue, however, has been reissued and is currently available on the Mainstream label I would expect that some of the Smith solos, and possibly both Lps intact, are available on that label.) The Dot Lp has also been deleted.

We are therefore extremely fortunate to have this new Lp of duets, featuring The Lion and Don Ewell, which shows Smith at the top of his form. It was made under ideal circumstances; the pianos were new and tuned that morning, the session occurred under first-class acoustical conditions in RCA Victor's Toronto studio, and the musicians were given complete freedom to play what they desired. It was produced as a labor of love by a fan of both pianists, and for that reason alone this effort deserves support. In addition, it is historically valuable as an addition to the stock of recorded material by The Lion.

But most importantly, by musical standards, this Lp is a delight, without a single bad - or even average - track. In our last record column, which also covered this Lp but concentrated on Ewell rather than The Lion, we suggested that you go right out and get a copy. If this article finds you still without this Lp, you are missing something.

Additional background on The Lion can be obtained not only in TAPR, but also from his readable and informative autobiography 'Music On My Mind' (Doubleday, N. Y. 1964).. Moreover, anyone desiring to sample his work can get six excellent solos, plus six others by another skilled veteran of the New York style, the late Luckey Roberts, on the Good Time Jazz Lp listed above; in fact, an upcoming record column will be devoted entirely to Roberts' work, and that Lp will be discussed in more detail at that point.

REPRINT CLUB NEWS

Membership in the Reprint Club - Chapter V is lower than last year. We urge all those interested in obtaining the fine reprints being issued this chapter . Thus far, two mail-outs of five rags each have been forwarded to subscribers. We're planning to issue as many as twenty-four rags in this chapter but we urgently need more subscribers in order to achieve this goal. PLEASE send your cheque for ten dollars and keep this very important department of the Ragtime Society active.

"RAGTIME BOB" IN ALASKA

The following article appeared in the Fairbanks, Alaska, Daily News-Miner in April, 1969.

DARCH TELLS RAGTIME STORY
By Chuck Hoyt

One of the foremost contemporary exponents of ragtime music is alive, well, and presently, this month at least, living in Fairbanks.

Although ragtime faded out in 1906, Bob Darch, a former colonel in the Corps of Engineers who perfected peculiar talents while post engineer at the unlikely place of Whittier, has been rinky-tink piano playing throughout the country since 1955 accompanied by his own "gravelly" voice.

Darch is a raconteur who tells of ragtime in a nostalgic manner by singing such sentimental tunes as "Who's Old Skate Are You?", "Porkchops", "South Franklin Street Rag", and "Flicker Red Rag", which he wrote himself, and other old favourites such as "Please Mother Don't Stab Father With That Bread Knife", "Oh, That Sardine In Your Hair", both written by that bard of the North, Robert Service. Other songs in Darch's repertoire are "Alaskan Rag", "Sleeping in the Klondike Vale Tonight", "Yakitat Piano Man" and "Squaws Along the Yukon".

Darch pounds out these tunes on a Cornish upright five-pedal saloon grand piano that was formerly owned by Tex Rickard, one-time owner of the Red Feather Saloon in Dawson and famous fight promoter.

Darch bought the piano from the estate in 1953 for $200, but it cost him another $350 to transport it to Seattle, which, if nothing else, proved Darch was in the music business to stay.

Darch was born in Detroit in 1920 and graduated from the University of Arizona as a civil engineer.

Darch began playing ragtime music as a kid - and he wants this understood. It is ragtime music he plays, not honky-tonk. He studied three years of standard grand piano and then four years from a colored man, Gene Turpin, one of the original ragtime artists.

He was in the Army from 1941 to 1954, originally stated as post engineer at Port Chilkoot. In 1947 he was assigned to Ft. Richardson just outside of Anchorage and then was transferred to Whittier where he spent five years as post engineer.

In 1954 he didn't re-enlist in the Army and with a year to re-up, he hit the ragtime trail. His first stop was the Red Dog Saloon in Juneau in 1955. While there he met Edna May Ferber who was in the throes of writing "Ice Palace". Whe introduced Darch to a Fortune magazine editor traveling in Alaska who did an issue featuring Darch and the Red Dog Saloon which put the end to Darch's career as an engineer, as he never did go back to the Army.

That same year a tourist boat came to Juneau with a fellow named Art Brick from Las Vegas who had seen the write-up in Fortune and hired Darch for the Showboat in Vegas. He stayed there 22 weeks and then back to Anchorage where he played at the Malemute Saloon owned by Betty Orick and Fran Ecklos. Numerous other engagements followed such as in the British Colonial Hotel in Nassau, Bahama Islands, where Burl Ives heard him and produced six Darch records as well as leading to three appearances on the Bell Telephone Hour show on NBC. This also led to concert work with the Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg and Kansas City symphony orchestras with Darch playing symphonic ragtime.

In 1963 Darch was approached by the Canadian Cultural Ministry to appear at the Dawson City Festival along with Bert Lahr and Larry Blyden who were starring in the Alaskan musical comedy, "Foxy", which later went on to Broadway.

After a summer at Dawson, Darch went on to travel through most of Canada, Venezuela and Mexico and is now back in Alaska.

Darch is presently playing at the Speakeasy in Fairbanks, but also specialized in giving shows to clubs, schools and is looking forward to an appearance at the Pioneers' Home tonight.

During these shows, courtesy of the American Federation of Musicians, he gives the history of contemporary music starting with ragtime in 1896, which led to the blues in 1906. Then in 1915 Dixieland took over which, according to Darch, is the first form of jazz. Boogie Woogie followed in 1920 and then the sophisticated jazz of the Paul Whiteman era in 1932. In 1940 be-bop hit the fancy of the fans until 1946 when progressive jazz held forth until it retreated before rock and roll in 1953.

The ragtime pianoman says he's available for appearances. All you have to do is ask.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Due to the depletion of our stock, back issues of the Newsletter will, for the present, no longer be available for sale.

SOMETHING DOING...

JOHN ARPIN - appearing at Sutton Place Hotel (Stop 33), Bay and Wellesley in Toronto between 5:30 and 8:00 p. m.

DON BURNS - appearing in Hamburg, New York.

JAKI BYARD - appearing at the Top of the Gate, New York, corner of Bleecker and Thompson in Greenwich Village.

BOB DARCH - appearing at Fairbanks, Alaska, last we heard.

DON EWELL - appearing with the Dukes of Dixieland.

JOHNNY MADDOX- Cherry Creek Inn, August 25th to October 4th.

KEN MAYHERCY - "Ragtime $ Bill" is appearing Saratoga, Wyo.

MAX MORATH - his off Broadway Show "At the Turn of the Century" is on the road.

WALLY ROSE - appearing at the Gold Dust Lounge 247 Powell St., in San Francisco.

LOWELL SCHREYER - at Michael's Gay 90's Restaurant (banjo) and Saturday nights in Mankato, Minn. (He has been here for 7 years.)

BOB SEELY - at Charlie Brown's in Detroit, Michigan.

RALPH SUTTON - at Sunnie's in Aspen, Colorado.

TREBOR TICHENOR and The St. Louis Ragtimers:
can be heard on the Goldenrod Showboat in St. Louis, Missouri.

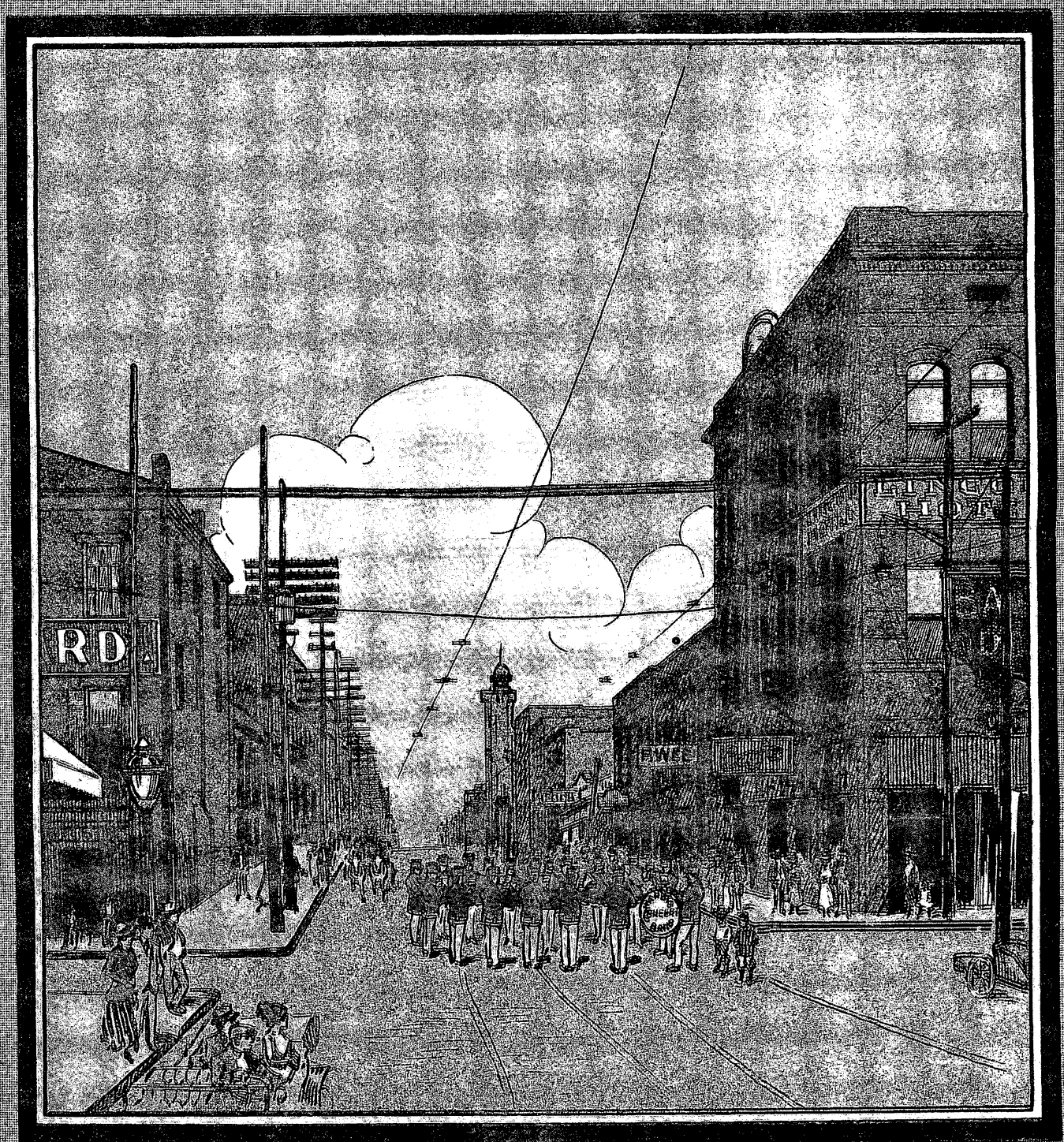
TEX WYNDHAM and The Red Lion Jazz Band
at Tyler's Restaurant, 1101 Philadelphia Pike, Wilmington, Del.

BEALE STREET

ANOTHER MEMPHIS "BLUES"

BY

W. C. HANDY



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"HOME OF THE BLUES"